

**IN THE CLAIMS**

Please amend claims 1-3, cancel claims 4-21 and add claims 22-32 in accordance with the following listing showing the status of all claims in the application.

1. (Currently Amended) ~~In an email system having an email~~ A method for use at a server coupled to that is accessible by a plurality of email sending applications, each having an email address, a method of determining status of a recipient email address, said method comprising:

maintaining status of the recipient email address in a status table a table of statuses for a plurality of email addresses, wherein the table is searchable using an by email address, and wherein the status for each email address indicates current email message receiving and/or handling capability at said email address;

sending receiving an inquiry from a sender application to the table with the recipient email address, when the sender application has resolved the recipient email address to send a message to the recipient email address, to determine the status of the recipient email address before the message is sent to the recipient email address regarding the status of a specified email address; and

in response to the inquiry, searching the table for and then transmitting the status for the specified email address.

2. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, wherein the ~~table is located in the server and the~~ status for the specified email address indicates if (1) the email address of the recipient email address is not valid or no longer valid, (2) the recipient email address is

set in an auto-reply mode, or (3) the auto-reply mode for the recipient email address is not set.

3. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, ~~wherein the step of recording status of the recipient email address further comprises the steps of~~ further comprising the steps of

~~notifying the server of the status of the recipient email address from a recipient application that assumes the recipient email address when the recipient email address changes its status in message receiving and handling;~~

recording receiving updates to the new status statuses of the recipient email address addresses on an ongoing basis; and

recording the updates in the table.

4-21 (Canceled)

22. (New) A method according to claim 1, wherein the table is located in an email server.

23. (New) A method of alerting a user prior to the user sending an e-mail message, said method comprising:

obtaining an indication that a user wishes to send an e-mail message to a designated e-mail address;

in response to said indication, transmitting a request regarding a current availability of a recipient that is associated with the designated e-mail address;

receiving a reply that indicates the availability of the recipient at the designated e-mail address; and

alerting the user, prior to the user sending the e-mail message, if the reply indicates that the recipient is not currently available at the designated e-mail address.

24. (New) A method according to claim 23, wherein the indication that the user wishes to send the e-mail message comprises entry of the designated e-mail address as an intended recipient of the e-mail message.

25. (New) A method according to claim 24, wherein the request is transmitted as soon as the designated e-mail address, as entered, has been resolved.

26. (New) A method according to claim 24, wherein the request is transmitted automatically in response to entry of the designated e-mail address as an intended recipient of the e-mail message.

27. (New) A method according to claim 23, wherein the user is alerted that the recipient is not currently available at the designated e-mail address while the user still is composing the e-mail message.

28. (New) A method according to claim 23, wherein the user is visually alerted that the recipient is not currently available at the designated e-mail address.

29. (New) A method according to claim 23, wherein the request is transmitted to a server that is known to maintain a database of current availability statuses for different e-mail addresses.

30. (New) A method according to claim 23, wherein the reply indicates if (1) the email address of the recipient e-mail address is not valid or no longer valid, (2) the recipient e-mail address is set in an auto-reply mode, or (3) the auto-reply mode for the recipient e-mail address is not set.

31. (New) An apparatus for alerting a user, prior to the user sending an e-mail message, that the intended recipient is not currently available at a user-designated e-mail address, said apparatus comprising:

- a processor for executing stored program instruction steps; and

- a memory connected to the processor for storing the program instruction steps,

- wherein the program instruction steps include steps of:

- obtaining an indication that a user wishes to send an e-mail message to a designated e-mail address;

- in response to said indication, transmitting a request regarding a current availability of a recipient that is associated with the designated e-mail address;

- receiving a reply that indicates the availability of the recipient at the designated e-mail address; and

- alerting the user, prior to the user sending the e-mail message, if the reply indicates that the recipient is not currently available at the designated e-mail address.

32. (New) An apparatus for alerting a user, prior to the user sending an e-mail message, that the intended recipient is not currently available at a user-designated e-mail address, said apparatus comprising:

- means for obtaining an indication that a user wishes to send an e-mail message to a designated e-mail address;

means for, in response to said indication, transmitting a request regarding a current availability of a recipient that is associated with the designated e-mail address;

means for receiving a reply that indicates the availability of the recipient at the designated e-mail address; and

means for alerting the user, prior to the user sending the e-mail message, if the reply indicates that the recipient is not currently available at the designated e-mail address.